

Spencer Museum and artist Dave Loewenstein celebrate re-imagined downtown Lawrence mural¹

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LAWRENCE — A celebration of the re-imagined “Pollinators” mural commissioned by the Spencer Museum of Art will take place from 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Friday, June 9, at 888 New Hampshire St. The public can enjoy music, refreshments and remarks from lead artist Dave Loewenstein and Mayor Leslie Soden.

The original “Pollinators” mural, commissioned by the museum and created by Loewenstein in 2007, was painted on the side of a building that was sold and demolished in March 2015. The Spencer Museum, the City of Lawrence, and property owner First Management reached an agreement to recreate the mural at the same site.

“It has been a pleasure working with the Spencer Museum of Art and the community to see the recreation of the ‘Pollinators’ mural come to fruition,” said President of First Management Robert Green.

Loewenstein has led an intensive, community-based process to create the mural involving public input meetings and community painting days. In addition to Loewenstein, the mural’s core design team includes Kansas City artist Nedra Bonds, KU student Eugene Sarmiento, and Lawrence High School student Janada Birdling.

“Our new design engages with those forces that inhibit or threaten pollination, considering questions about what plants and creatures are thought of as pests or weeds and why,” Loewenstein said. “It celebrates the capacity of art and artists to envision a more just and sustainable world.”

More than 120 people of all ages participated in the mural's community painting days during Memorial Day weekend. Spencer Curator Susan Earle, who organized the exhibition on painter Aaron Douglas that inspired the original mural, said community involvement for projects like "Pollinators" is essential.

"For both murals, the original and the re-imagined design, so much inspiration has come not only from the style of Aaron Douglas and the history of Kansas, but from the community," Earle said.

The re-imagined "Pollinators" honors the six African-American artists from the original mural — Gordon Parks, Gwendolyn Brooks, Langston Hughes, Oscar Micheaux, Hattie McDaniel and Coleman Hawkins — with the addition of contemporary musician, actress, and Kansas City native Janelle Monáe.

"Our team recognized that the original group of artists all came from a particular time period associated with the Harlem Renaissance and wanted to add more contemporary figures to help broaden the mural's meaning," Loewenstein said.

Photo: More than 120 people participated in community painting days for the re-imagined "Pollinators" mural in downtown Lawrence. Image courtesy of Dave Loewenstein.

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